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THE MUSEUM AND THE SCHOOLS

LAST year more teachers and their classes visited the Museum than ever before, and it is hoped that still more may come this year. The Museum desires to be of real service to this class of its visitors, and to make every effort through its Instructor, class room, and lectures, to meet the needs of all who find its collections helpful in teaching.

Some of the numerous questions concerning the wisdom and feasibility of coöperation between museums of art and schools, questions which quite naturally arise in the minds of teachers and museum people alike, are interestingly treated in the following paper by Miss Louise Conolly, of Newark, formerly Supervisor of Schools in Montclair, N. J.

IF I WERE YOU

A MUSEUM ROMANCE

I

SEVERAL years ago I was a teacher in a small town in central Missouri. They brought to our town a young man with a long forelock which used to droop over his forehead and which he constantly shook back by a movement of the head. He was to be our art supervisor.

He taught the children to make birds' nests of clay, and landscapes of colored paper, and posters with colored crayon, and to "pose" for each other, holding rakes and wearing sunbonnets, and to "hook" rugs as their grandmothers used to do.

He took them out to sketch the horse-chestnut trees, and had them paint apples and apple blossoms in water color. Also the older classes punched leather. Finally, they made "spots" of different shapes with brushes dipped in ink and water of various degrees of blackness or grayness, and they decorated stool tops and sofa cushions with the "designs" made by combining these spots. To the older pupils he spoke of "motifs" culled from flowers, fruits, and animals, and one class made a bedspread of squares of white cloth on which were "squared animals."

The children loved to do these things. Whenever anyone asked them what study they liked best, they cried out "Art."

Sometimes, instead of having the children do things, he brought into the room packages of "Perry Pictures" about which he and the children talked together, telling each other what they liked and what they did not like about them, and why.

Everyone thought the art course wonderful, but the supervisor was not happy. He said he was "dissatisfied with results." "What results do you want better than you have?" we asked him. "The art exhibit in the superintendent's office is beautiful." "I want," he said, "to connect it all with life, and I can't get it done. It should influence the daily life in the homes of the town."

Finally he made a big playhouse of a dry-goods box, and set the children to competing for the furnishing of it. They wove rugs for the floors, made designs and painted paper for the walls, made more designs and carved furniture from cigar-

box wood, embroidered and stenciled curtains, cut out tissue paper and put in stained-glass windows, and thatched the roof. At last they came to the decoration of the walls with the pictures. "When you sit about your open fire on a cold winter night," said the art supervisor to the class, "what kind of picture will you like to see on your walls?" "A spring landscape," said one. "A brook in summertime, flowing over stones," said another, for brooks in Missouri are muddy streams flowing darkly between muddy banks. "The ocean waves, beating against big rocks," said another, whose family for three generations had not seen the sea. Then up piped loyalty to home customs — "Can't you have no pictures of your cousins what's dead?"

"Now," said the art supervisor with kindling eye, "we are arriving. It is the 'pictures of cousins what's dead' that I came to conquer."

Out in Missouri we had so little back-ground to lean against, so little ground to stand upon, so little to aid us in the cultural environment! Here you have so much! That is why I head this article "If I Were You."

If I were you, teachers in Great New York, I would make all times, all countries, all classes, all climes, all genius, all prosperity contribute to the culture of my children. There is no spot in this or any other land whose teachers can not rightfully look on you with envy of your opportunities, and tell what great things they would accomplish if they were you.

II

I said something of this to a vigorous young public school teacher of New York City. "If I were you," said I. —

"Yes," said she, "If you were me — I mean, if you were I — you would each evening correct the papers of the day and prepare the lessons of the next day. And every morning you would go five miles to school full of joy and cheer. And you would all day long teach grammar, and oral and written composition, and reading, and spelling, and literature, and history,

and geography, and penmanship, and art, and music, and physical culture, and patriotism, and ethics, and hygiene with especial attention to stimulants and narcotics, and every lesson would be based on apperception, and interest, and involve self-activity and self-direction, and would consist of preparation, presentation, explication, drill, and application. And you would cause the children to be always soft-stepping, low-spoken, clear in enunciation, erect, clean, industrious, and perfectly free."

I smiled. I knew well that this teacher was going to do what all good teachers do when you suggest anything good to them — first flout it, second adopt it, and third declare that they have always done it that way. So, indeed, she did in this case, and wrote for me the story which here follows.

III

I had always intended to take my class to the Metropolitan Art Gallery. This year I began to do it. I did it thus:

I had an 8A class. I told the children on one Friday that they might bring in on some Tuesday morning a composition called "My Visit to the Metropolitan Gallery of Art." Whoever would bring it in on the next Tuesday would get, as a composition mark, whatever the essay deserved, plus ten credits. Whoever would bring it in on the second Tuesday thereafter, would get a composition mark plus eight credits. Those bringing in the essay on the third Tuesday would get the rightful mark plus six credits. The fourth Tuesday the added credits would be four. After that I made no promises.

Every Tuesday I received a number of essays, and on Friday I read out the marks for them, and advised everyone to go to the gallery during the next two days. Every Monday I asked who had been and gave them some time to write their essays in school hours.

On the fifth Friday there were still eight children who had not been to the gallery. I met five of them at the school on the following morning and went with them to the museum, letting them roam

about at will there, and making no suggestions as to what they should look at. The next day one of these took one of the three remaining pupils to the gallery, and the next Tuesday morning I got essays from the six, and from the two who could not go at all because they worked both Saturdays and Sundays for wages, I accepted essays on some picture which they had seen in a house, a store, a church, or elsewhere. Both described scenes shown at "The Movies."

My reason for insisting on this first unsupervised visit was that I wanted the strangeness of the museum to wear off a little before attempting a lesson there. I cannot, myself, study one thing at a museum on a first visit to it. My eyes are attracted to many things so that I cannot see one.

Meanwhile, I had not been idle. I visited the museum on a Sunday to see how "the people" made use of it, and I could write a long chapter on what I saw. Also, on the Mondays when I let those children who had been to the museum write upon that trip, I had the rest of the class write upon other personal experiences, such as "The Most Exciting Experience of My Life," and "The Most Beautiful Thing I Ever Saw;" and among those topics I included, "How I Spent Yesterday." As these were Monday essays, I got illuminating information upon the Sunday avocations of themselves and their families.

And I paid two visits to the museum on week days. Once I went to find just what sort of creature a "docent" might be. The literature which is so handsomely printed and so liberally distributed to us teachers, and which all of us so systematically throw into the waste basket, with no thought of the living personalities at the other end of the correspondence, had produced in my mind a vague notion that I could get something for nothing if I would call on the museum, and that its officers wished to do me good because I was a teacher. I don't know why that attitude in any institution awakens resentment in me. But it does, and I think it does in many teachers. Half rates to

teachers, special terms to teachers, information free to teachers, even when we take advantage of them, seem to convey some sort of sentimental flavor to our relations with the world, involving perhaps an obligation of unworldliness on our part, perhaps a kind of implication of social and financial disadvantage. The feeling is too illusive to be accurately formulated, but substantial enough to cause me to put seductive-looking museum leaflets into the fire.

A docent — my docent — is an indefatigable lady, refined and cordial, full of information on art, artists, and curios, but vague in her notions of New York Public School children. She will do anything in the world for you except break the rules of the museum. But she will stretch them. She walked about with me, telling me what she had done for many other teachers, and she showed me the reference picture collection, the library, the lecture room, and the collection of lantern slides. And she gave me literature, much of it duplicating what I had thrown away. Once you have seen this friendly docent, who seems eager to function, full of the feeling that she has intrusted to her riches that ought to be used, you see, when a piece of museum literature drifts your way, shining eyes of invitation, and outstretched hands of welcome behind it.

I told the docent that I would send her certain topics which I should like to use the museum to help me teach, and that, on receipt of a note from her, I would come to see what material she had for me. Then I looked over the subjects which I was teaching at that time, and I sent her the following demands:

1. I am teaching design from two motifs — the rose and the daisy, and I want to show my children how these motifs have been used for decoration in many times and by many peoples.

2. I have taught my children, by a comparison of Scott and Shakespeare, that each author has his own style in telling a story. I want to show them that each artist has his own style in depicting a scene. For that purpose, I want two landscape artists as different in style as my two authors

are — say Corot and Constable. I want to show the children several pictures by each artist, and reproductions of several more.

3. This country was settled by the French, the Dutch, the English, the Spanish. I want to see articles of use and beauty showing that, in the sixteenth century, these four nations had about the same degree of civilization, but differences of custom.

4. We have read Scott's *Lady of the Lake* and Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. I want anything in art that will lend interest to either or both of these.

I sent in this requisition to the museum on Tuesday. On Friday I got a note saying that all was ready for me, and on Saturday I went to the museum and looked over the prepared material myself, so as to be ready to do my teaching under the supervision of the docent. She had expected to do it for me, but I wouldn't accept that. My pupils are not going to think that I can't instruct them in archaeology, eschatology, or any other ology or onomy that percolates into the course of study, from whatsoever source it may come.

On Wednesday afternoon, the class and I went to the museum together — forty-two girls and boys in fine raiment and high spirits they were, and one care-full woman was I. But a nice little German mother went along, and herded them in the rear while I marched in the van.

We got permission of everybody, and gathered blessings as we went. Getting the parents' permission was the great task. I made a penmanship lesson of the notes, having each pupil write one perfect in form and take it home Tuesday for the parent's signature. Only two came without it. One of these had a cousin in the 8B grade who vouched for its being all right, and the other I took on faith without mishap. I had to pay four forgotten carfares, and two of these were returned next day. The comments we collected en route were friendly. "It's the Children's Crusade," said one; "They're juvenile militants," said another; "Ain't de public schools goin' some?" said a third.

I gave two lessons.

Because the museum had only one Constable, the docent advised Ruysdael for the second artist. There are three Corots and three Ruysdaels in the galleries, counting Jacob and Salomon Ruysdael as one, which suited our rough classification well enough. I had the children study hard these six pictures. The only help or suggestion that they got was from the docent, who told me within their hearing that Corot, it is said, achieved his spots of color by using a brush in either hand. Then we went to a class room where there are tables, which we sat around, and they studied again the photographic reproductions of these six pictures, which were supplied in abundance. Then a characteristic picture (in reproduction) of each was hung where all could see it and the test was given.

For the test I had reproductions of five other Corots than those in the Metropolitan and five other Ruysdaels, which the docent produced from the reference library of prints. I gave each pupil a slip of paper, on which he wrote his initials and ten numbers. I clamped a slip of paper, bearing a number, at the top of each picture. Then each picture was held up for inspection before the pupils at each table and each pupil wrote, opposite the proper number, the letter C or the letter R. On the first test 33 out of 42 received 70 per cent or over, though only one had a perfect paper.

Those making less than 70 per cent were allowed to study several examples of each artist again, and the test was made, giving as a result two papers worth 80 per cent, two 70 per cent, and the others below 70 per cent. The two who made 80 per cent on this test had made 40 per cent and 30 per cent before; they are both children who find concentration difficult. The fact that so little gain was made by the second study may be significant. I am no experimental psychologist, but I shall watch future classes on this point.

Then I asked each pupil to make on the back of the slip some comment indicating what differences he found between the two artists. The results were meagre.

"Corot is mussy, Ruysdael is neat;" "C. puts water in his ink;" "Corot is full of spots;" "R. puts it down the way it is, while C. has it the way it isn't;" "One tells facts and the other is fanciful;" "Ruysdael crinkles his leaves and Corot dapples his stems." — These were the best of the comments.

This whole study took fifty minutes.

Then we began our search for daisy and rose decorations. The children learned how to label their notes according to the rooms which they visited, and listed roses and daisies used in various materials by different peoples; for example,
Egyptian — Ceiling sections

Tiles

Dutch -- Pottery

Wooden bed

French — Chair covers-textile

Iron screen.

Chinese — Platters

The search became so exciting that I herded my charges out of the building with difficulty. And, as I learned afterward, several of them went back and conducted a still hunt of their own, the fruits of which, in the guise of sundry wonderful sketches, they displayed with pride next morning.

"When shall I elucidate Shakespeare for you?" said the docent in parting.

"Next time," said I.

There will be a next time, and a next, and a next, for I know my way now.

And when I begin to reckon up the value of the work, I think that this is the chief value for the children as well as for myself. True, we have learned: 1. That an artist has a style which a tyro may recognize if he so choose; 2. That the little problems which our art teacher sets for us make us fellows with all craftsmen in all countries and all times, working in many different media and by many different tools. But chiefly we have learned that the museum and all it holds and stands for is ours. When I asked the children on Thursday morning how their feeling about the museum had changed, they were even more inarticulate than in their attempts to formulate Corot's style. Most of them mentioned the "kindness of the lady." But Felix de Grafenried seemed to voice the common feeling when he said, "I found out that the museum ain't only to brag about."

It were well, I think, could many intelligent adult citizens learn that.

